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# Olton Pools

by John Drinkwater

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TO  
EDMUND GOSSE





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# OLTON POOLS

## Dedication

TO E. G.

### I

SOMETIMES youth comes to age and asks a  
blessing,

Or counsel, or a tale of old estate,

Yet youth will still be curiously guessing

The old man's thought when death is at his  
gate ;

For all their courteous words they are not one,

This youth and age, but civil strangers still,

Age with the best of all his seasons done,

Youth with his face towards the upland hill.

Age looks for rest while youth runs far and wide,

Age talks with death, which is youth's very  
fear,

Age knows so many comrades who have died,

Youth burns that one companion is so dear.

So, with good will, and in one house, may dwell

These two, and talk, and all be yet to tell.

But there are men who, in the time of age,  
 Sometimes remember all that age forgets :  
 The early hope, the hardly compassed wage,  
 The change of corn, and snow, and violets ;  
 They are glad of praise ; they know this morning  
brings

As true a song as any yesterday ;  
 Their labour still is set to many things,  
 They cry their questions out along the way.  
 They give as who may gladly take again  
 Some gift at need ; they move with gallant  
 ease

Among all eager companies of men ;  
 And never signed of age are such as these.  
 They speak with youth, and never speak amiss ;  
 Of such are you ; and what is youth but this ?

## BIRTHRIGHT

LORD RAMESES of Egypt sighed  
Because a summer evening passed ;  
And little Ariadne cried  
That summer fancy fell at last  
To dust ; and young Verona died  
When beauty's hour was overcast.

Theirs was the bitterness we know  
Because the clouds of hawthorn keep  
So short a state, and kisses go  
To tombs unfathomably deep,  
While Rameses and Romeo |  
And little Ariadne sleep. |

## ANTAGONISTS

GREEN shoots, we break the morning earth  
And flourish in the morning's breath;  
We leave the agony of birth  
And soon are all midway to death.

While yet the summer of her year  
Brings life her marvels, she can see  
Far off the rising dust, and hear  
The footfall of her enemy.



## OLTON POOLS

(TO G. C. G.)

Now June walks on the waters,  
And the cuckoo's last enchantment  
Passes from Olton pools.

Now dawn comes to my window  
Breathing midsummer roses,  
And scythes are wet with dew.

Is it not strange for ever  
That, bowered in this wonder,  
Man keeps a jealous heart ? . . .

That June and the June waters,  
And birds and dawn-lit roses,  
Are gospels in the wind,

Fading upon the deserts,  
Poor pilgrim revelations ? . . .  
Hist . . . over Olton pools !

## THEY ALSO SERVE

BRIDE birds among your leaves to-day  
Watching from England green,  
Your mates have gone what sorrier way,  
And you, what have you seen?—

Of all things known but this you know—  
Against the falling night  
The myriad mates for ever go,  
Upon some alien flight.

Hushed upon frosty trees you wait  
That paragon of springs,  
When seaward shall the sound be great  
Of fond returning wings.

## FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

LONG since the sorrows of the nightingales  
Came throbbing through the night to lattices  
Where women watched whose amours had made  
rich

The days of soldiers now gone out in mail  
And carven plate, with battleaxe and bow,  
Faring and fallen, or happily to be  
Home on some twilight road, a lonely spear. . . .

Long since, that so these ladies and their loves,  
And casements looking on to battlefields  
Where still a loyal crest might wear a rose,  
Have perished, or grown fabulous, all song,  
Or mist of mummers, or a crazy tale  
For those book-learnèd fools who miss the  
world. . . .

There is a wood in Warwickshire to-day,  
Haunted and hushed with midnight nightin-  
gales—

O summer song. And there are fields of France,  
And fields, O love, by many an alien sea. . . .

## CLOUDS

BECAUSE a million voices call  
Across the earth distractedly,  
Because the thrones of reason fall  
And beautiful battalions die,  
My mind is like a madrigal  
Played on a lute long since put by.

In common use my mind is still  
Eager for every lovely thing—  
The solitudes of tarn and hill,  
Bright birds with honesty to sing,  
Bluebells and primroses that spill  
Cascades of colour on the spring.

But now my mind that gave to these  
Gesture and shape, colour and song,  
Goes hesitant and ill at ease,  
And the old touch is truant long,  
Because the continents and seas  
Are loud with lamentable wrong.

## NINETEEN-FIFTEEN

ON a ploughland hill against the sky,  
Over the barley, over the rye,  
Time, which is now a black pine tree,  
Holds out his arms and mocks at me—

“ In the year of your Lord nineteen-fifteen  
The acres are ploughed and the acres are green,  
And the calves and the lambs and the foals are  
    born,  
But man the angel is all forlorn.

“ The cropping cattle, the swallow’s wing,  
The wagon team and the pasture spring,  
Move in their seasons and are most wise,  
But man, whose image is in the skies,

“ Who is master of all, whose hand achieves  
The church and the barn and the homestead  
    eaves—

How are the works of his wisdom seen  
In the year of your Lord nineteen-fifteen ? ”

## RIDDLES, R.F.C.\*

(1916)

HE was a boy of April beauty ; one  
Who had not tried the world ; who, while the  
sun

Flamed yet upon the eastern sky, was done.

Time would have brought him in her patient  
ways—

So his young beauty spoke—to prosperous days,  
To fulness of authority and praise.

He would not wait so long. A boy, he spent  
His boy's dear life for England. Be content :  
No honour of age had been more excellent.

\* Lieut. Stewart G. Ridley, Royal Flying Corps,  
sacrificed his life in the Egyptian desert in an attempt  
to save a comrade. He was twenty years of age.



FOR APRIL 23RD

1616—1916

ONE thing to-day  
For England let us pray—  
That, when this bitterness of blood is spent,  
Out of the darkness of the discontent  
Perplexing man with man, poor pride with pride,  
Shall come to her, and loverly abide,  
Sure knowledge that these lamentable days  
Were given to death and the bewildered praise  
Of dear young limbs and eager eyes forestilled,  
That in her home, where Shakespeare's passion  
grew  
From song to song, should thrive the happy-  
willed  
Free life that Shakespeare drew.

## SEPTEMBER

WIND and the robin's note to-day  
Have heard of autumn and betray  
The green long reign of summer.  
The rust is falling on the leaves,  
September stands beside the sheaves,  
The new, the happy comer.

Not sad my season of the red  
And russet orchards gaily spread  
From Cholesbury to Cooming,  
Nor sad when twilit valley trees  
Are ships becalmed on misty seas,  
And beetles go abooming.

Now soon shall come the morning crowds  
Of starlings, soon the coloured clouds  
From oak and ash and willow,  
And soon the thorn and briar shall be  
Rich in their crimson livery,  
In scarlet and in yellow.

Spring laughed and thrilled a million veins,  
And summer shone above her rains  
To fill September's faring ;  
September talks as kings who know  
The world's way and superbly go  
In robes of wisdom's wearing.

## SUNRISE ON RYDAL WATER

(TO E. DE S.)

COME down at dawn from windless hills  
Into the valley of the lake,  
Where yet a larger quiet fills  
The hour, and mist and water make  
With rocks and reeds and island boughs  
One silence and one element,  
Where wonder goes surely as once  
It went  
By Galilean prow.

Moveless the water and the mist,  
Moveless the secret air above,  
Hushed, as upon some happy tryst  
The poised expectancy of love ;  
What spirit is it that adores  
What mighty presence yet unseen ?  
What consummation works apace  
Between  
These rapt enchanted shores ?

Never did virgin beauty wake  
Devouter to the bridal feast  
Than moves this hour upon the lake  
In adoration to the east ;  
Here is the bride a god may know,  
The primal will, the young consent,  
Till surely upon the appointed mood  
Intent  
The god shall leap—and, lo,

Over the lake's end strikes the sun,  
White, flameless fire ; some purity  
Thrilling the mist, a splendour won  
Out of the world's heart. Let there be  
Thoughts, and atonements, and desires,  
Proud limbs, and undeliberate tongue,  
Where now we move with mortal oars  
Among  
Immortal dewes and fires.

So the old mating goes apace,  
Wind with the sea, and blood with thought,  
Lover with lover ; and the grace  
Of understanding comes unsought  
When stars into the twilight steer,  
Or thrushes build among the may,  
Or wonder moves between the hills,  
And day  
Comes up on Rydal mere.

## WORDSWORTH AT GRASMERE

THESE hills and waters fostered you  
Abiding in your argument  
Until all comely wisdom drew  
About you, and the years were spent.

Now over hill and water stays  
A world more intimately wise,  
Built of your dedicated days,  
And seen in your beholding eyes.

So, marvellous and far, the mind,  
That slept among them when began  
Waters and hills, leaps up to find  
Its kingdom in the thought of man.

## WRITTEN AT LUDLOW CASTLE

(IN THE HALL WHERE COMUS WAS  
FIRST PERFORMED)

WHERE wall and sill and broken window-frame  
Are bright with flowers unroofed against the  
    skies,

And nothing but the nesting jackdaws' cries  
Breaks the hushed even, once imperial came  
The muse that moved transfiguring the name  
Of Puritan, and beautiful and wise  
The verses fell, forespeaking Paradise,  
And poetry set all this hall aflame.

Now silence has come down upon the place  
Where life and song so wonderfully went,  
And the mole's afoot now where that passion  
    rang,

Yet Comus now first moves his laurelled pace,  
For song and life for ever are unspent,  
And they are more than ghosts who lived and  
    sang.



## HOLINESS

If all the carts were painted gay,  
And all the streets swept clean,  
And all the children came to play  
By hollyhocks, with green  
Grasses to grow between,

If all the houses looked as though  
Some heart were in their stones,  
If all the people that we know  
Were dressed in scarlet gowns,  
With feathers in their crowns,

I think this gaiety would make  
A spiritual land.

I think that holiness would take  
This laughter by the hand,  
Till both should understand.

✓  
THE CITY

A SHINING city, one  
Happy in snow and sun,  
And singing in the rain  
A paradisal strain. . . .  
Here is a dream to keep,  
O Builders, from your sleep.

O foolish Builders, wake,  
Take your trowels, take  
The poet's dream, and build  
The city song has willed,  
That every stone may sing  
And all your roads may ring  
With happy wayfaring.

## DAFFODILS

AGAIN, my man of Lady Street,  
Your daffodils have come, the sweet  
Bell daffodils that are aglow  
In Ryton woods now, where they go  
Who are my friends and make good rhymes.

They come, these very daffodils,  
From that same flight of Gloucester hills,  
Where Dymock dames and Dymock men  
Have cider kegs and flocks in pen,  
For I've been there a thousand times.

Your petals are enchanted still  
As when those tongues of Orphic skill  
Bestowed upon that Ryton earth  
A benediction for your birth,  
Sun-daffodils that now I greet.

Because, brave daffodils, you bring  
Colour and savour of a spring  
That Ryton blood is quick to tell,  
You should be borne, if all were well,  
In golden carts to Lady Street.

## JOHN'S TUNE

(TO A. J. G. AND J. E. S.)

Now God be praised who gives us light,  
And hills on which the light may fall,  
And a song to sing at the end of the night  
When over the paddocks the starlings call.

The sun is waiting in the sky  
And surely has but kind to say,  
And with never a cloud for company,  
So come, and we'll travel away to-day.

A road for you, a hill for me,  
A river Joe may shine upon,  
Never has been such luck of three  
Since first went walking any John.

Shake out your stars from pockets lined  
With pence enough for pilgrimage,  
Not one of us all but has a mind  
Fit to challenge the earth's old age.

## TO THE DEFILERS

Go, thieves, and take your riches, creep  
To corners out of honest sight ;  
We shall not be so poor to keep  
One thought of envy or despite.

But know that in sad surety when  
Your sullen will betrays this earth  
To sorrows of contagion, then  
Beelzebub renews his birth.

When you defile the pleasant streams  
And the wild bird's abiding-place,  
You massacre a million dreams  
And cast your spittle in God's face.

✓  
ANTHONY CRUNDLE

*Here lies the body of  
ANTHONY CRUNDLE,*

*Farmer, of this parish,  
Who died in 1849 at the age of 82.  
"He delighted in music."*

*R. I. P.*

*And of  
SUSAN,*

*For fifty-three years his wife,  
Who died in 1860, aged 86.*

ANTHONY CRUNDLE of Dorrington Wood  
Played on a piccolo. Lord was he,  
For seventy years, of sheaves that stood  
Under the perry and cider tree ;  
*Anthony Crundle, R.I.P.*

And because he prospered with sickle and  
scythe,  
With cattle afield and labouring ewe,  
Anthony was uncommonly blithe,  
And played of a night to himself and Sue ;  
*Anthony Crundle, eighty-two.*

The earth to till, and a tune to play,  
And Susan for fifty years and three,  
And Dorrington Wood at the end of day . . .  
May providence do no worse by me ;  
*Anthony Crundle, R.I.P.*



## OLD OLIVER

OLD Oliver, my uncle, went  
With but a penny for his needs,  
Walking from Cotsall hill to Clent,  
His pocket full of poppy seeds.

And every little lane along  
He scattered them for good man's will,  
And then he sang a happy song  
From Clent again to Cotsall hill.

## DERBYSHIRE SONG

COME loving me to Darley Dale  
In spring time or sickle time,  
And we will make as proud a tale  
As lovers in the antique prime  
Of Harry or Elizabeth.

With kirtle green and nodding flowers  
To deck my hair and little waist,  
I'll be worth a lover's hours. . . .  
Come, fellow, thrive, there is no haste  
But soon is worn away in death.

Soon shall the blood be tame, and soon  
Our bodies lie in Darley Dale,  
Unreckoning of jolly June,  
With tongues past telling any tale ;  
My man, come loving me to-day.

I have a wrist is smooth and brown,  
I have a shoulder smooth and white,  
I have my grace in any gown  
By sun or moon or candle-light. . . .  
Come Darley way, come Darley way.

## MILLERS DALE

BAREFOOT we went by Millers Dale  
When meadowsweet was golden gloom  
And happy love was in the vale  
Singing upon the summer bloom  
Of gipsy crop and branches laid  
Of willows over chanting pools,  
Barefoot by Millers Dale we made  
Our summer festival of fools.

Folly bright-eyed, and quick, and young  
Was there with all his silly plots,  
And trotty wagtail stepped among  
The delicate forget-me-nots,  
And laughter played with us above  
The rocky shelves and weeded holes  
And we had fellowship to love  
The pigeons and the water-voles.

Time soon shall be when we are all  
Stillter than ever runs the Wye,  
And every bitterness shall fall  
To-morrow in obscurity,  
And wars be done, and treasons fail,  
Yet shall new friends go down to greet  
The singing rocks of Millers Dale,  
And willow pools and meadowsweet

TO THE LOVERS THAT COME  
AFTER US

LOVERS, a little of this your happy time  
Give to the thought of us who were as you,  
That we, whose dearest passion in your prime  
Is but a winter garment, may renew  
Our love in yours, our flesh in your desire,  
Our tenderness in your discovering kiss,  
For we are half the fuel of your fire,  
As ours was fed by Marc and Beatrice.  
Remember us, and, when you too are dead,  
Our prayer with yours shall fall upon love's  
spring  
That all our ghostly loves be comforted  
In those yet later lovers' love-making;  
So shall oblivion bring his dust to spill  
On brain and limbs, and we be lovers still.

## LOVE IN OCTOBER

(TO K.)

THE fields, the clouds, the farms and farming  
gear,

The drifting kine, the scarlet apple-trees . . .

Not of the sun but separate are these,  
And individual joys, and very dear ;

Yet when the sun is folded, they are here

No more, the drifting skies : the argosies

Of wagoned apples : still societies

Of elms : red cattle on the stubbled year.

So are you not love's whole estate. I owe

In many hearts more dues than I shall pay ;

Yet is your heart the spring of all love's light,

And should your love weary of me and go

With all its thriving beams out of my day,

These many loves would founder in that night.

## DEFIANCE

O WIDE the way your beauty goes,  
For all its feigned indifference,  
And every folly's path it knows,  
And every humour of pretence.

But I can be as false as are  
The rainbow loves which are your days,  
And I will gladly go and far,  
Content with your immediate praise.

Your lips, the shy lover's bane,  
I take with disputation none,  
And am your kinsman in disdain  
When all is excellently done.

## A CHRISTMAS NIGHT

CHRIST for a dream was given from the dead  
To walk one Christmas night on earth again,  
Among the snow, among the Christmas bells.  
He heard the hymns that are his praise:

*Noel,*

*And Christ is Born, and Babe of Bethlehem.*

He saw the travelling crowds happy for home,  
The gathering and the welcome, and the set  
Feast and the gifts, because he once was born,  
Because he once was steward of a word.

And so he thought, "The spirit has been kind;  
So well the peoples might have fallen from me,  
My way of life being difficult and spare.

It is beautiful that a dream in Galilee  
Should prosper so. They crucified me once,  
And now my name is spoken through the world,  
And bells are rung for me and candles burnt.  
They might have crucified my dream who used  
My body ill; they might have spat on me  
Always as in one hour on Golgotha." . . .

And the snow fell, and the last bell was still,  
And the poor Christ again was with the dead.

## INVOCATION

As pools beneath stone arches take  
Darkly within their deeps again  
Shapes of the flowing stone, and make  
Stories anew of passing men,

So let the living thoughts that keep,  
Morning and evening, in their kind,  
Eternal change in height and deep,  
Be mirrored in my happy mind.

Beat, world, upon this heart, be loud  
Your marvel chanted in my blood,  
Come forth, O sun, through cloud on cloud  
To shine upon my stubborn mood.

Great hills that fold above the sea,  
Ecstatic airs and sparkling skies,  
Sing out your words to master me,  
Make me immoderately wise.



## IMMORTALITY

### I

WHEN other beauty governs other lips,  
And snowdrops come to strange and happy  
springs,  
When seas renewed bear yet unbuilt ships,  
And alien hearts know all familiar things,  
When frosty nights bring comrades to enjoy  
Sweet hours at hearths where we no longer  
sit,  
When Liverpool is one with dusty Troy,  
And London famed as Attica for wit . . .  
How shall it be with you, and you, and you,  
How with us all who have gone greatly here  
In friendship, making some delight, some true  
Song in the dark, some story against fear?  
Shall song still walk with love, and life be brave,  
And we, who were all these, be but the grave?

## II

No ; lovers yet shall tell the nightingale  
    Sometimes a song that we of old time made,  
And gossips gathered at the twilight ale  
    Shall say, " Those two were friends," or,  
    " Unafraid  
Of bitter thought were those because they loved  
    Better than most." And sometimes shall be  
    told  
How one, who died in his young beauty, moved,  
    As Astrophel, those English hearts of old.  
And the new seas shall take the new ships home  
    Telling how yet the Dymock orchards stand,  
And you shall walk with Julius at Rome,  
    And Paul shall be my fellow in the Strand ;  
There in the midst of all those words shall be  
Our names, our ghosts, our immortality.

## THE CRAFTSMEN

CONFEDERATE hand and eye  
Work to the chisel's blade,  
Setting the grain aglow  
Of porch and sturdy beam—  
So the strange gods may ply  
Strict arms till we are made  
Quick as the gods who know  
What builds behind this dream.

## PETITION

O LORD, I pray : that for each happiness  
My housemate brings I may give back no less  
Than all my fertile will ;

That I may take from friends but as the stream  
Creates again the hawthorn bloom adream  
Above the river sill ;

That I may see the spurge upon the wall  
And hear the nesting birds give call to call,  
Keeping my wonder new ;

That I may have a body fit to mate  
With the green fields, and stars, and streams in  
spate,  
And clean as clover-dew ;

That I may have the courage to confute  
All fools with silence when they will dispute,  
All fools who will deride ;

That I may know all strict and sinewy art  
As that in man which is the counterpart,  
Lord, of Thy fiercest pride ;

That somehow this beloved earth may wear  
A later grace for all the love I bear,  
For some song that I sing ;

That, when I die, this word may stand for me—  
He had a heart to praise, an eye to see,  
And beauty was his king.

I thank the Editors of *The Cambridge Magazine*,  
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*Review*, *The New Witness*, *The Saturday Review*, *The*  
*Sphere*, and *To-Day*, by whom some of these poems  
were first printed



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